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Twins Tragic Victims of Belgium's Assisted Suicide Law

Proponents of the "Death With Dignity" suicide laws that are currently allowing people in Washington, Oregon, and Montana to kill themselves may want to consider the tragic end of twin brothers in Belgium who decided they didn't want to live anymore. The 45-year-old brothers, identified by [USA Today](#) as Marc and Eddy Verbessem, were both deaf, and had recently learned that they were soon to go blind as well. That news led them to the conclusion that they would rather die than become dependent upon others. While Belgium supposedly allows euthanasia only in cases of "unbearable suffering," and a local doctor had denied the Verbessems' request to help them die, the two found an eager helper in David Dufour, a doctor at Brussels University Hospital who agreed to assist at their suicides by lethal injection December 14. Dufour told German television network RTL that the brothers were "very happy" to be able to end their lives, and he was only too glad to help.



"It was a relief to see the end of their suffering," Dufour said. "They had a cup of coffee in the hall, it went well and a rich conversation. The separation from their parents and brother was very serene and beautiful." At the end, "there was a little wave of their hands and then they were gone." And with that Dufour tidied up, put away the instruments of death, and went on with his own life.

Family members said that Marc and Eddy, who had worked as cobblers, were growing distraught over the prospects of going blind, and though their parents and brother tried to talk them out of it, the suicide option, made relatively easy by Belgian society, proved too appealing to resist.

"They lived together, did their own cooking and cleaning," their brother Dirk told the *London Telegraph*. "You could eat off the floor. Blindness would have made them completely dependent. They did not want to be in an institution." He said that their "great fear was that they would no longer be able to see each other. That was for my brothers unbearable." He added that many might wonder "why my brothers opted for euthanasia, because there are plenty of deaf and blind that have a 'normal' life. But my brothers trudged from one disease to another. They were really worn out."

From 2002 through 2011, some 5,500 Belgians chose their country's legalized suicide option, according to the [European Institute of Bioethics](#). For 2011, the most recent figures available, the death toll was 1,133. All told, nearly one percent of all deaths in Belgium are from euthanasia, mostly as an alternative to some other terminal disease. The twins' deaths are unusual because neither of them was terminally ill, and they were not suffering physical pain that would supposedly have justified suicide. "I do not think this was what the legislation meant by 'unbearable suffering,'" said the local doctor who originally



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denied the men's request for death.

Shockingly, days after the Verbessems' deaths, Belgium's ruling socialist party introduced legislation that would have expanded the euthanasia law to include adults with dementia and even children, provided, the legislation stipulated, that "they are capable of discernment, or beset by an incurable illness or suffering that cannot be alleviated." As it is, only those 18 and older can choose death, or have it chosen for them. Mercifully, level heads prevailed in the country's parliament and the proposal was shelved — for the time being.

But many observers predict that it is only a matter of time before Belgium records its first "mercy killing" of a child, and any other person or group they might choose to justify. "It is clear that what is occurring in Belgium is the logical extension to legalizing euthanasia," said Alex Schadenberg of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition. "If it is acceptable to kill one group of people in society by euthanasia, then it will soon become acceptable to kill other groups of people in society by euthanasia."

Schadenberg emphasized that the Verbessem twins "were not suffering. They were not sick. But they were deemed to be 'better off dead.'"

The rise of legalized euthanasia — which has spread to the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Switzerland, in addition to Washington, Oregon, and Montana — has even spawned a new form of tourism — suicide tourism — whereby individuals travel, often with their families, to such locales for the "right" to have a doctor kill them like a veterinarian might euthanize a family pet.

"It is troubling that doctors who swear an oath to do no harm are carrying out these procedures," observed [Catholic Online](#). Equally troubling is that "a criteria for suicide exists and that an increasingly liberal method of calculus is being used to determine who dies. It is troubling that we now consider life so cheap that we can end it not just in the womb, but after birth too — and that a distinction is even made between the value of a life wracked by terminal illness and pain and a life without suffering. Indeed, there should be no distinction drawn between the two — life is life, no further distinctions are necessary."

Noted bioethics writer Wesley Smith pointed out that in a "morally sane society," death doctors like Belgium's esteemed David Dufour "would lose their licenses and be tried for homicide. But Belgium no longer fits that description."

Smith, who has covered the issue of physician-assisted suicide for the past two decades, said that he was not surprised that a doctor had agreed to help end the "suffering" of two men who otherwise might have continued productive, meaningful lives. "Once killing is seen as an answer to human suffering," he observed. "the meaning of the term becomes very elastic and the killable caste, like the universe, never stops expanding."



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